NYT
June 27, 1974

Under the Summit

By William Safire

ESSAY

MOSCOW, June 26—The most delicate and profound negotiations over the past six years, passing another milestone here at the third U.S.-Soviet summit, have not been the dealings between Mr. Nixon and Mr. Brezhnev. They have been the negotiations between Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kissinger, whose differences in approach have rarely surfaced but which may explain some of what has happened in the past month and much of what will happen next week.

President Nixon, a graduate of the John Foster Dulles school of international affairs, carried a hardliner's suspicion of long-range Soviet intentions into his planning for a structure of peace. His goal as he came into office was for a limited peace, with power centers cooperating to keep out of war, but with the ideological struggle continuing until, in some far distant future, forms of democracy would persevere over forms of Communism.

Henry Kissinger's policy, from the start, had a different emphasis: His approach was to wage total peace, setting aside considerations of rectitude or the furtherance of human freedom in the interests of making certain of human survival. Such a survival-first concern in a nuclear age presents a practical argument, although it was hardly the stuff of Patrick Henry slogans.

When the two men began to work together, their fundamental approaches greatly overlapped, since détente was the first order of business for both. But anyone who worked on foreign policy speeches for Mr. Nixon knew how carefully the President re-shaped the drafts submitted by Mr. Kissinger so as to impose his own philosophy, to the intense irritation of his national security adviser, who despised what he termed "that cold-war rhetoric."

Nixon-Kissinger negotiations became especially intense prior to summit meetings, when the President — after all the spadework had been done — would suddenly and cruelly freeze out his advance agent, to cut him down to size. "A week ago, he was on his knees," Henry used to rage, "and now I can't even get past Haldeman."

Came Watergate, and the unsullied superstar of the Nixon Administration exacted his revenge. The price of his loyalty was absolute capitulation on the Nixon-Kissinger negotiations. Ideological struggle was dead.

Thus it was that the President, sounding like a brain-washed Rubashov at a show trial, earlier this month read a détente-first speech completely crafted by the agent he once thought he could control. "We cannot gear our foreign policy to the transformation of other societies," he read, making any struggle useless by exaggerating its goal.

And then the President passed along Mr. Kissinger's threat: "What price in terms of renewed conflict are we willing to pay to bring pressure to bear for humane causes?"

The victory of amorality was underscored by the ventriloquist plaintive apology: "Peace between nations with totally different systems is also a high moral objective."

Then came Mrs. Kissinger's public tantrum at Salzburg, the sudden revelation of Mr. Nice Guy as Mr. Tough Guy, and his identification with the wiretap origins of Watergate. The Nixon-Kissinger negotiations were promptly reopened.

That is why Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, who in 1968 wrote a position paper on national security that was too hawkish for Candidate Nixon, has found it possible to assert a note of caution in developing the latest U.S. position on arms control.

That is why Senator Jackson, who was Mr. Nixon's first choice for Defense Secretary and who shares the President's submerged instincts toward ultimately coming out ahead in an ideological struggle, has taken heart and taken on the Secretary of State.

As a result, the President comes to Moscow with sloppy erasures all over his position papers but in a curiously strong position. Thanks to Mr. Kissinger's superb Middle Eastern diplomacy, Mr. Nixon once again enters Moscow on a note of triumph; thanks to Mr. Kissinger's over-reaction at Salzburg, the President once again is at least partially in control of the philosophy behind U.S. foreign policy. He will wave the plume of détente in Eastern windows, but is less likely to act as if the struggle nought availeth.